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**Testimony of Rep. Mary Mushinsky in Support of PHB 5809, An Act Concerning a
Parenting Course for Low Income Families**

Before the Human Services Committee

March 5, 2015

Sen. Moore, Rep. Abercrombie and committee members:

Thank you for allowing a hearing on this bill. I previously served as chairwoman of the Committee on Children for 10 years and still serve on the Child Poverty and Prevention Council, a multi-agency group. As a result, I am always on the lookout for successful programs to fight child poverty (about 22% of children in the U.S. are in this category) and improve outcomes for children and youth. I want the Human Services Committee to be aware of a parenting program from Georgia which has been evaluated by the National Academy of Sciences and found to be highly successful at strengthening families and improving children's health. I hope we will bring this model to Connecticut.

The Strong African-American Families Project (SAAF) is a joint partnership between the Center for Family Research and the University of Georgia Extension Service. Nearly 500 families from 8 counties participated in the seven-week, family centered program, many in single-parent family units. The project partners trained community professionals, called SAAF extension educators, and reached out to schools, faith-based organizations and community stakeholders to engage families and build trust in the program.

The amazing result is that when researchers took another look at 272 of the children, eight years after their parents took the parenting course, they were measurably healthier: the now 19-20 year old grown children had significantly lower systemic inflammation in

their bodies. The children of parents who took the seven-week parenting course had dramatically improved physical and mental health compared to their peers in the clinical trial's control group.

In addition, the SAAF parents themselves were evaluated by the program in comparison to parents on the waiting list for the course. The SAAF parents showed fewer symptoms of depression and increased levels of effective parenting practices compared to the waiting list parents. They more readily engaged their children in conversations about how to avoid substance use and risk behaviors. SAAF youth showed higher levels of self-control and goal-setting behavior than the waiting list children and felt more confident they could resist peer pressure to engage in risky behavior.

The National Academy of Sciences indicates the improvement in health and outcomes is actually visible in the bodies of these children. Nurturing by trained parents is able to strengthen the children and make them medically more resilient as young adults.

The State of Georgia launched the parenting program in 2008 with a \$3.4 million grant from the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. The curriculum has since been adopted by agencies in California, Colorado, Pennsylvania, Iowa and Washington, D.C. If Connecticut were to adopt this approach, we could seek to use our federal Tobacco Settlement funds or, at a minimum, ask the Department of Social Services to obtain the Georgia curriculum.

Attachments: Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences

L.A. Times: Improved parenting may fortify low-income kids against poverty effects

UGA Today: Strong African-American Families Project at UGA Celebrates Success